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COMMISSION
OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL

SEP 24 2 43 PM '99

20 September 1999

The Honorable Scott E. Thomas
Chairman
Federal Election Commission
999 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20463

Dear Chairman Thomas:

I am filing a complaint with the Federal Election Commission because of selective, unbalanced and excessive political news coverage of ABC News, CBS News, CNN (Political), CNBC News, Fox Network News, NBC News, and MSNBC News as separate units, or as independent companies or through their parent corporations. I feel their actions should be deemed as surrogate "political action committees" or "affiliated political action committees." I feel the Commission should review each broadcasting license for possible revocation for willful violation of the Federal Election Commission rulings governing "reasonable access" (or "equal time") or to be in violation of Federal Election Commission ruling prohibiting "any corporate contribution whatever" to include any gift of money or anything of value for the purpose of influencing a Federal election.

Each of the broadcasters hosts one or more news talk type shows featuring their "journalists" and "journalists" from other news reporting organizations. These talk shows include, but are not limited to Meet the Press and the Today Show – NBC News; Face the Nation – CBS News; This Week, Nightline and Good Morning America – ABC News; Talk Back Live, Larry King Show, CNN&Company, Capitol Gang, Late Edition and Inside Politics – CNN; HardBall – CNBC News; Watch It, Drudge, Internight – MSNBC News; O'Reilly Factor – Fox News. Additionally, these talk shows appear deceptively to screen public telephone callers to their guests to advance one particular public thought.

This letter also serves as a complaint to the Commission against ABC News, CBS News, CNN (Political), CNBC News, Fox Network News, NBC News, or MSNBC News as separate units, or as independent companies or through their parent corporations asserting they have crossed own professional standards practices boundaries of providing information and news to the American public and have become inappropriate corporate electronic voter guides advocating the election of an individual or group of political candidates for Federal elective office.

Finally and contrary to the Commission's Associate General Counsel/Policy, its AO 1998-17 ruling does not address the substance of my inquiry. The exemption holding of the Commission AO 1998-17 ruling contemplates fair and balanced commentary and news reporting practices. Moreover, the standards and practices of today's news organizations have become not only more aggressive, but also has become less responsive to public expectations of fairness in news reporting, accuracy in opinion interpretation and to equal access of candidates or their positions for elective office.

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The Commission should not permit its opinion in the AO 1998-17 ruling to be used as a cover for irresponsible broadcasters and journalists to advance their surreptitious political agenda neither to advance the political expectations of favored candidates over another nor to destroy disfavored candidates.

The airwaves belong to the public not by any broadcast news organization. The public has a right and an expectation to fair and balanced broadcast news reporting. The complaint here would not "limit or burden in any way first amendment freedoms of the press," and would not interfere with "the unfettered right of newspapers, TV networks, and other media to cover and comment on political campaigns."

In today's news reporting environment, there cannot be any public policy determination that broadcast news organizations may engage in excessive political coverage and not have their practices to be viewed as an inappropriate contributory toward a particular candidate or political party.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Robert B. Brann", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

cc: Members, FEC
General Counsel, FEC

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